PART V

Crops

Major Crops

Wahkiakum County cropland is devoted mainly to raising hay, silage and other forage crops as part of its specialization in dairy and livestock farming. In 1954 the most important crops listed in order of acreage harvested were: clover and timothy hay (2,800 acres), grass and small grain silage (970 acres), wild and other hay (620 acres), commercial vegetables, primarily cucumbers and cabbage (230 acres), oats (50 acres) and mint (46 acres).

Crop Trends

A number of changes are apparent in the emphasis and acreages Wahkiakum farmers have given to leading crops in the last 15 years. There is an increasing emphasis in dairy and beef livestock farming and specialized production of cash crops for processors. The trend shows the influence of mechanization of farming with its decrease in horses and the improved overland highway.

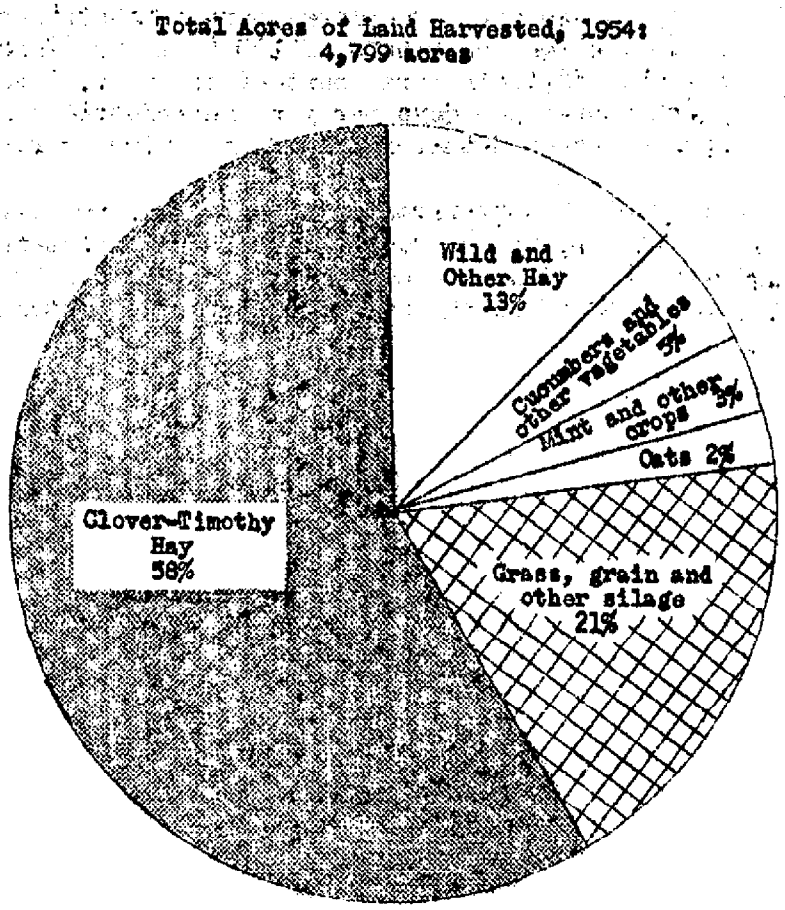

Figure 11.- Percent of Total Cropland in Leading Crops
Wahkiakum County, 1954.
(Based on U.S. Census, Agriculture, 1954)

facilities which make the marketing of wholemilk and perishable vegetable products easier. Some farmers have found specialization in cash crops such as cucumbers and mint to their advantage.

Crops which have been expanded for local livestock feeds and commercial markets in adjacent population and processing centers include clover and timothy hay, grass silage, cucumbers and potatoes. Clover and timothy has been expanded from a low of 150 acres in 1946 to 2,900 acres in 1955. Grass silage is up from 660 acres in 1949 to 970 in 1954. Cucumbers for Puget Sound and Portland area processors are up from 5 acres in 1950 to 325 in 1956.

Decreased acreages have occurred in peppermint, alfalfa, barley and fruit orchards. Peppermint acreage went down from 285 acres in 1954 to 15 in 1956. Alfalfa, a small crop, is down to 10 acres. Fruit orchards with 20 trees or more are down to 25 acres.

Hay and Silage Crops

For many years hay and silage have been the largest harvested crops used directly on livestock farms or sold in local trade with dairy and livestockmen. All hay and grass silage normally covers about 4,450 acres or 79 percent of the harvested cropland. A large amount of forage production is needed to support a cattle population of over 10,000 head and about 200 head of horses and sheep.

Table 11.- Clover-Timothy Hay and Alfalfa Hay
Acreage, Yield and Production
Wahkiakum County, 1939-1955.

Year	Clover and Timothy Hay			Alfalfa Hay		
	Acreage (acres)	Yield (tons per acre)	Production (tons)	Acreage (acres)	Yield (tons per acre)	Production (tons)
1939	810	2.6	2,100	10	2.0	20
1940	700	2.0	1,400	10	2.0	20
1941	800	2.1	1,680	10	2.0	20
1942	500	2.4	1,200	20	3.0	60
1943	300	2.1	630	30	2.0	60
1944	150	3.4	5,100	20	1.5	30
1945	140	2.5	350	20	2.0	40
1946	150	2.5	380	20	2.0	40
1947	340	2.6	870	20	2.0	40
1948	660	2.8	1,850	20	2.5	50
1949	950	2.1	2,000	20	2.5	50
1950	1,000	2.3	2,300	20	3.0	60
1951	1,400	1.6	2,240	20	3.0	60
1952	1,900	2.9	5,500	20	3.0	60
1953	2,300	2.6	6,000	20	3.0	60
1954	2,800	2.1	5,900	10	2.0	20
1955	2,900	1.7	5,000	10	2.0	20

Source: U.S. Dept. of Agric., AMS, Estimates Division, State of Washington.

Nearly two-thirds of the farms grow hay for on-farm use or local sale. The area is barely self-sufficient in feed production and in some years some dairy farms must purchase hay from other counties in the Washington interior. Less than 20 farms had surpluses for sale in 1954.

Clover and clover-timothy mixture is the leading hay crop. While the county is small in cropland area compared with other counties it is thirteenth in production of this type of hay. With increasing local needs for hay, clover and timothy has been increased from 145 acres grown in 1945 to 2,900 in 1955. Yields vary considerably year to year because of varying moisture conditions. In 1953 the heaviest crop in recent years--6,000 tons--was harvested from 2,300 acres. Clover and timothy are grown mainly in the Skamokawa, Elokomin and Grays River Valleys. Some is grown on Puget Island where mint and cucumbers are generally the main crops.

The practice of preparing grass silage is developing rapidly as a method of utilizing green forage crops more efficiently. It also lessens losses in hay quality from damp weather at harvest time. Several dairy farms have added silage cutters and installed silage pits and silos in recent years. There were 54 farms putting up silage in 1954, which was eight more than in 1949. Silage was harvested from over 970 acres in 1949. In recent years Wahkiakum dairy and general livestock farmers have been storing over 6,600 tons of green feed per year.

Table 12.- Oats and Barley: Acreage, Yield and Production
Wahkiakum County, 1939-1955.

Year	Oats (for grain)			Barley (for grain)		
	Acreage (acres)	Yield (bushels per acre)	Production (bushels)	Acreage (acres)	Yield (bushels per acre)	Production (bushels)
1939	10	80	800	20	40	800
1940	10	68	680	20	35	700
1941	10	60	600	20	35	700
1942	1/	--	--	20	38	760
1943	--	--	--	10	35	350
1944	--	--	--	1/	--	--
1945	--	--	--	--	--	--
1946	--	--	--	--	--	--
1947	--	--	--	--	--	--
1948	--	--	--	--	--	--
1949	--	--	--	--	--	--
1950	10	36	360	--	--	--
1951	10	35	350	--	--	--
1952	20	45	900	--	--	--
1953	40	44	1,760	--	--	--
1954	50	34	1,700	--	--	--
1955	60	36	2,160	--	--	--

1/ Acreage less than 10 acres and not recorded by U.S. Census of Agriculture nor estimated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Source: U.S.D.A., AMS, Agric. Estimates Division
State of Washington

Oats, Other Small Grains and Corn

Grass and legume feed crops are supplemented by green and threshed oats, other grain hays and some field corn. Grain crops, however, have decreased in importance since 1930. Oats and other grain hays which formerly were quite important have decreased about two-thirds, the acreage going down from 310 to 100 acres since 1950. Losses from rainfall and wet weather at the time of ripening and harvest have caused grain growing to be limited. Climatic conditions are unfavorable for wheat and field corn which require warm growing weather to mature. Oats were increased slightly between 1950 and 1954 but barley has declined to almost negligible amounts since 1943.

Vegetables

Vegetables are now the most valuable commercial crop. Commercial vegetable sales, largely cucumbers, cabbage and sweet corn, went up from less than $3,000 in 1950 to over $66,000 in 1954. Market vegetable gardens are mainly located on the fertile river bottom soils of Puget Island. About 45 farms were producing commercial vegetables in 1954, whereas in 1950, there were only three. In addition to the commercial farms there were about 250 farms growing vegetables for home use. Total acreage of truck crops has ranged from 250 to over 350 acres in recent years. Before 1950 the acreage was minor, being less than 10 acres.

Table 13.- Vegetable Crops: Cucumbers and Cabbage
Wahkiakum County, 1939-1956

Year	Cucumbers		Cabbage	
	Acres harvested	Prod. (tons)	Acres harvested	Prod. (tons)
1939	1/	--	1/	--
1940	--	--	--	--
1941	--	--	--	--
1942	--	--	--	--
1943	--	--	--	--
1944	--	--	--	--
1945	--	--	6 2/	30 2/
1946	--	--	--	--
1947	--	--	--	--
1948	--	--	--	--
1949	5 2/	20	1	5
1950	3	15	1	--
1951	3	15	--	--
1952	--	--	--	--
1953	15	60	20	100
1954	230	690	20	100
1955	275	1,180	25	260
1956	325	2,000	20	140

1/ Not available nor estimated by Census or crop reporters.
2/ U.S. Census of Agriculture data.

Sources: U.S. Census of Agriculture
U.S.D.A., AMS, Agric. Estimates Division

Cucumbers for processors in the Portland and Tacoma metropolitan areas has been the main cash vegetable crop in recent crop years. In 1955 and 1956 Puget Island and adjacent Columbia River bottomlands comprised the most specialized cucumber growing district of the state. Processors of pickles and relishes in recent years contracted with Puget Island growers for sizable tonnages of cucumbers. In 1956 Wahkiakum County ranked second behind Yakima in harvested cucumber acreage, but was first in total tonnage. Over 40 farms produced a total of 2,000 tons from 325 acres in Wahkiakum County in 1956.

Berries

Berry farming in Wahkiakum County has followed an irregular pattern in recent years. Production has been mainly for home and local use and has not reached a significant commercial scale. Fewer than a half-dozen farms have planted any fields that might be considered commercial. Lack of nearby processing outlets and a limited local fresh market are factors discouraging specialization in strawberries, caneberries and bushberries. Recent census enumerations have recorded the following production for local use: strawberries 5,000 pounds, blackberries 650 pounds, raspberries 1,000 pounds, boysenberries 200 pounds and blueberries 600 pounds. In 1956 there were about 5 acres of strawberries, 5 acres of raspberries and 2 acres of blueberries in commercial production.

Tree Fruits

Damp, cool, climatic conditions and lack of marketing opportunities have resulted in only a minor development of orchard growing. Orchards are nearly all of the homestead, local-use type. In 1954 the Census found only 25 acres of total orchard land in the county exclusive of the plantings with 20 trees or less. Apples, plums, sweet and sour cherries are the most common trees in the subsistence type orchards. Filberts were introduced in the 1930's but are only in a few local-use orchards.

Mint

Wahkiakum County was a pioneer area in the state in peppermint growing. Introduced in the 1930's on the low river bottom lands of the Columbia River and on Puget Island, this crop yielded well and provided an important cash income to over 25 growers at this time. By 1939 there were 130 acres yielding about 40 pounds of distilled oil per acre. Production increased up to 285 acres in the early 1950's. A serious Columbia River flood in 1948 damaged considerable mint acreage and some distilling units. After 1954, mint farming was largely abandoned and declined to its present status of about 15 acres. Leaf rust infestations and inability to market in competition with new large-scale growers in Yakima and Benton Counties also are factors in the decline. Some mint growers changed over to vegetable growing and livestock farming.

Table 14.- Mint: Acreage and Production
Wahkiakum County, 1939-1956.

Year	Mint Acreage	Production (lbs. of oil)
1939	130	6,320
1940	1/	---
1941	---	---
1942	---	---
1943	---	---
1944	---	---
1945	---	---
1946	---	---
1947	---	---
1948	200	9,200
1949	200	9,000
1950	250	11,500
1951	280	12,500
1952	285	12,350
1953	285	12,825
1954	285	13,255
1955	15	870
1956	15	870

1/ Not available 1940 to 1948.

Sources: U.S. Census of Agriculture.
Wash. State Dept. of Agriculture, Horticultural Inspectors Reports.
U.S.D.A., AMS, Agric. Estimates Div.